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Media Availability

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Chargé Hogan: I would like to say first of all that I am delighted to be in Sumgait. I am a new arrival to Azerbaijan. I just arrived to the country five weeks ago, so this is my first trip outside of Baku. I have had the opportunity to meet with the head of the Executive of Power; I have had the opportunity to meet with civil society groups including the Democracy and Human Rights Center. What I am really here to do is just to really understand what is happening at the local level here. So I would be glad to take a couple of questions. And after lunch with some youth and some professionals who have visited the United States to hear from them, I will have the opportunity to go to the Technology Park here in Sumgait so I can get an opportunity to see the economic development here in Azerbaijan, in Sumgait in particular.

So please, your questions.

Media: [Through Interpreter]. Do you have any news on the newly appointed Minsk Group co-chair's arrival, coming to Azerbaijan? Do you know when he will start officially his work?

Chargé Hogan: Thank you for that question. The appointment by the Secretary of State of Ambassador Jim Warlick is a very important development and we hope it will bring new energy to the Minsk Group Process. Ambassador Warlick has already been in contact with the embassy regarding his plans to visit Azerbaijan, so we are working with the government of Azerbaijan on defining when that time will be, but I think it will be very soon.

Media: [Through Interpreter]. Have you discussed the pre-election situation in Sumgait?

Chargé Hogan: Yes. Yes, I have. Of course the election, being on October 9, is a very important development in Azerbaijan. That is a theme that is part of every meeting here I have in Sumgait of course as well as in Baku.

Our Ambassador, Ambassador Morningstar, recently released a statement welcoming the announcement of the election date, October 9, but also laying out our hope for what will be a very transparent—very open—electoral process.

We say that the election is not just what happens on election day, but of course the process leading up to that. So I have had the opportunity to talk to both government officials as well as those in civil society on that issue.

Media: Ambassador Morningstar said the U.S. government will enhance its efforts to help resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Will that be the case?

Chargé Hogan: I do not want to get ahead of Ambassador Warlick's particular plans for how we can help support and reinvigorate the OSCE Minsk Group process, but I can tell you that we have already been in conversations, intense conversations, with the government of Azerbaijan, particularly on what we (the Minsk Group and the United States in particular) can do to support the process. So we will continue to have that conversation when Ambassador Warlick comes to Azerbaijan, and obviously he will visit Armenia as well. Once we have that conversation with him, once he has a conversation with the government of Azerbaijan, we can discuss next steps.

But clearly, we see the elections, right now. That is probably an important focal point for the government of Azerbaijan. Following elections we are very much hoping that we can really reenergize the process.

One thing I can add to that point, though, is that we understand how frustrating it is to Azerbaijanis that we have not seen more progress in this effort, so I can assure you that the United States, as a co-chair of the Minsk Group, takes this process very seriously and we will even do more in the months to come.

Unfortunately I just had a call from the presidential administration about an urgent issue so I really can only do one more question.

Media: Have you learned about the economic potential of Sumgait? Is there any plan to cooperate on economic issues in the city?

Chargé Hogan: That is something that I am learning now, particularly when I have the meeting with the Technology Park. I can tell you that the head of the ExCom, identified economic development as a top priority. He also made sure to make me aware that President Aliyev is working directly with the executive committees to figure out exactly what additional steps can be taken.

But clearly the Technology Park is a step in the right direction. A big step.

Thank you again for this opportunity to meet with you, and again, I look forward to learning even more about Sumgait. Thank you.

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